

Galax City Council
Minutes
February 8, 2021

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on February 8, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:00 p.m. Mayor Greene called the meeting to order with the following Council persons present and they are as listed: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Haynes. Councilman Larrowe joined via telephone and Councilman Warr was absent.

Councilman Haynes prayed the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of January 11, 2021 and the called meeting of February 1, 2021. Vice Mayor Mitchell seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Larrowe.

Keith Barker - City Manager, informed Council that the draft social media policy had been received from our attorney on Friday, February 5, but more time was needed to review it internally before it was brought to Council. There was a consensus among Council to carry this item over to the March meeting.

Mayor Greene welcomed Mr. Corbin Stone - Managing Director with Robinson Farmer Cox, for the FY2020 Audit Presentation. Mr. Stone discussed the audit and letter with Council. He said the City of Galax had done a great job and there were no significant findings within the audit. Mayor Greene thanked Keith Barker, Judy Taylor-Gallimore, and staff for their hard work. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the FY2020 Audit. Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Larrowe.

Keith Barker informed Council of an update which included pending legislation on the previously discussed Crosswalk Project. Mr. Barker sent a copy of the HB1841 draft legislation to Chris Pollins with CCSA. The pending legislation would require all new or maintained crosswalks to be painted in a zebra pattern, black and white only. He explained the legislation had been amended to form a study group from VDOT, VML, VACO, etc. to see if there should be model requirements for crosswalks that address safety for visually impaired people. He said with that in mind, he recommended to Ms. Pollins that the Public Art Committee not proceed with any crosswalk work at this time, pending the final outcome of the legislation and study group.

David Phipps - Galax Registrar, was present to make a request on behalf of the Electoral Board to consider the consolidation of voting districts (North & South) so that there would be only two (East & West) within the City. It was noted that this request would require an ordinance and mass mailing, so a future public hearing would be required. Councilwoman White made the

motion to authorize a public hearing in March for the ordinance. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Larowe.

Keith Barker discussed the process City Council was undertaking with a search for the City Manager. Mr. Barker explained that Council had engaged Berkley Group, LLC to advertise and conduct the search for City Manager candidates. He said an initial meeting had been held with Council and Berkley group staff and an advertisement was expected by the end of February. He said applications would be received by the Berkley Group, who would then review and recommend the first group of candidates to be interviewed by Council. Mr. Barker said follow-up interviews or consideration of additional candidates may then occur as Council deemed necessary. He said a final selection for City Manager would be made after a thorough review of qualifications and references by both Council and Berkley Group. Mr. Barker asked Council to amend the FY2021 budget with a transfer of \$25,000 from line item *10.4.7104.1003 Recreation Part Time* to *10.4.1101.3200 Contracted Labor* for the agreement with Berkley Group. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the budget amendment. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Larowe.

Galax Fire Department Chief - Mike Ayers & Assistant Chief - Eric Hale, gave an update on the fire department and to discuss two issues concerning fire trucks. Chief Ayers explained there were exciting things happening with the Galax Fire Department and he had very positive remarks for the members. He said their motto was now "Forward Together". Chief Ayers first spoke regarding the Oren Fire Squirt Truck. He explained the Galax FD membership had been giving consideration on what they would like to do with the older model ladder/squirt truck they own. He said after reviewing options concerning refurbishment for a display/museum truck, they did not feel that this was an option that they could take on. They had contacted the Virginia Fire Museum from Roanoke VA concerning the truck. The museum had agreed to take the truck, perform refurbishment as needed, and would then use it as a display. Chief Ayers explained in the event that the museum closed, they would return the truck to the GFD. This would be a transfer of ownership to the museum and they would insure and tag it as necessary. The GFD membership met to discuss an option which included a straight donation of the truck or the truck being donating on a permanent loan basis. Chief Ayers said they had elected to pursue the first option that was presented, pending approval from Council. Mr. Barker noted the surplus property resolution Council approved would permit this under Section 2(e) with specific action from Council. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the request to transfer ownership of the Oren Fire Truck to the VA Fire Museum in Roanoke, VA. Councilman Haynes seconded the request and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Larowe.

The seconded item Chief Ayers made Council aware of involved the Galax Fire Department ladder Truck. He explained the GFD ladder truck had a recent failure of the water line (water way) that carried water up the extended ladder. He said there was a structural break in a support and a bending of the pipe. Chief Ayers explained while this was being repaired, the GFD membership had been considering the age of the truck (1987) as well as the repairs over the last few years. They had decided it would be best to pursue the purchase of a truck with their own funds (\$400k - \$500k budget) since the City purchased the new rescue truck a few years ago.

Keith Barker commented that the GFD contributed \$10,000 per year to the debt service on the rescue truck which was the most recent purchase. In order to assist the GFD in the purchase, staff recommended that Council allow the GFD to keep that \$10,000 yearly debt service contribution and put it towards this ladder truck purchase, also allowing any proceeds from the sale of the current ladder truck to be returned to the GFD to assist in reducing the loan amount. Chief Ayers thanked Council for their continued support of the GFD. Assistant Chief Eric Hale commented that the values that had been instilled in the Galax Fire Department, which made the GFD so great, were the results from Fire Department leadership over the years such as Mayor Greene. Councilwoman White made the motion to eliminate the \$10,000 per year debt service from the GFD for the rescue truck and allow the proceeds from the sale of the GFD ambulance as well as the current ladder truck, when that occurred, to be returned to the GFD. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Larrowe.

Councilman Larrowe, who was traveling, had to leave the meeting by telephone.

Keith Barker informed Council of a request from Tammy Smith, Galax DSS Director. Mr. Barker explained with the recent passing of Ms. Theda Early and the resignation of Dr. Art Pemberton, Council was asked to consider 2 appointments to the Galax DSS Advisory Board. Ms. Kisha Johnson and Dr. Rev. Kevin Rosenfeld were both approached and were interested in the appointments. One appointment would be for the remaining portion of Ms. Early's term (Aug. 2024) and Dr. Pemberton's term (Aug. 2022). Both would then be eligible for reappointment at the end of the initial term. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to appoint Kisha Johnson to the remaining term of Theda Early and appoint Dr. Rev. Rosenfeld to the remaining term of Dr. Pemberton. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman White.

Keith Barker made a request of Council to amend the City FY2021 budget to recognize additional revenue and expenditures for advertising at the golf course. He explained that ads were sold for new scorecards and we showed the revenue and included those funds within golf course operations. The revenue line was 10.3.3180.1008 - \$3,000 – Contributions from Private Sources and the expenditure line was 10.4.7107.6014 - \$3,000 – Golf Course Other Operating. Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the budget amendment. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman White.

Keith Barker informed Council that 2020 legislation amended the amount that was allowable for direct solicitation in quotes from \$100,000 to \$200,000 for procurement purposes. Mr. Barker explained this was for direct purchases and repairs, but did not include professional services or VDOT type work. He said our attorney stated that Council could amend our procurement policy to raise the limit if desired. Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the amendment to our procurement policy. Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman White.

Keith Barker informed Council of a request from Ms. Susan Tilley, Galax School Superintendent regarding the expiring terms (June 30, 2021) of Mr. Ray Kohl and Ms. Leah Henck. Mr. Barker

said with Council's permission, we could begin advertising (Gazette and our FB page) for the appointments to the school board with interviews on April 12 and the appointments on May 10. Councilwoman White made the motion to authorize advertisements for the appointments to the Galax School Board. Vice Mayor Mitchell seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman White.

Keith Barker discussed the possibility of implementing a cigarette tax in Galax. He explained in 2020 the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation to allow counties to implement a cigarette tax beginning July 1, 2021. The same legislation restricted the maximum fee for counties, and communities that had not implemented the tax to \$0.40 per pack. Mr. Barker traveled with managers from Grayson, Carroll, Smyth, Wythe, Bland and the MRPDC to the Northern VA Cigarette Tax Board (representing 19 communities) to view the operations and how they collected and distributed the tax. He said with a small operation (5 employees), they collected approximately \$1.1M monthly that was distributed to each of the partner localities based on the number of packs of cigarettes shipped from wholesalers to retailers in those communities. He said in discussions with these local managers, there was a consensus to approach this from a regional organization approach and presentation to respective boards and councils for consideration as a possible ordinance and tax revenue source. The following were actions that would be required from each locality:

- **Development of the organization and structure.** Legislation now being introduced that would require 6 localities to participate in a regional approach. If the legislation failed, we would still approach this with the current localities, but could approach towns within those counties that would want to participate.
- **Development of the ordinance.** We envisioned this being with Sands Anderson as a single attorney so all ordinances would be the same.
- **Setting of tax rates.** While this would not be required, it was imagined that a single rate would be the easiest to implement. There was a desire by the county partners to move to the 40¢ per pack rate, however that was still up to each locality when they adopt an ordinance. From our perspective, Galax should not be any higher than Grayson or Carroll so that any local businesses were not impacted.
- **Development of the tax stamp that is placed on each pack of cigarettes at the wholesale level.** This would be done in partnership with the state and wholesale suppliers for each business that sells cigarettes.
- **Hiring of staff to run the organization.** This was foreseen as being through MRPDC with finance and inspectors.
- **Timeline** – We envisioned that this would take at least 6 months to move through all of the steps, so no taxes would be collected until after the beginning of the FY2022 fiscal year. The general thought from the study group of managers was that this might be feasible by January 1, 2022.

Mr. Barker explained while this was a new tax for the localities in discussion, it was in place in most Virginia cities, and in towns near us which included Wytheville, Marion, Pulaski, and Abingdon. He said it was known that Bluefield, VA generated approximately \$350,000 per year based on a 12.5¢ per pack rate. There was a consensus from Council to continue the discussions with the potential regional partners.

Keith Barker gave an update on the Downtown Safety Improvement Project, VDOT Project 113319. Mr. Barker said that he and Jimmy Moss, Project Manager, had a conference call with our VDOT rep and our engineer which concerned the grant project for the 200 N. Main St. road diet/sidewalk project. The intent of the project was to remove the 3rd traffic lane from the southbound lane on Main St. and provide a wider sidewalk and more parking. As the design had progressed, and we were made aware of more VDOT regs which concerned intersections and crosswalks, the project had reduced to essentially a handicapped accessible project which improved the intersection at N. Main St. and Center St. only. Mr. Barker said while it was not the project we had envisioned; we were looking for alternatives from VDOT during the conference call. He said with VDOT's encouragement; we would like to continue the current project even with the reduced scope of work we envisioned.

Mr. Barker said since it was a 100% grant, there was no cost to the City except for staff time. We would like to pursue a Transportation Alternative Project (80/20 match) with VDOT to improve the sidewalks and parking as originally envisioned on the 200 N. Main St. block, and at the same time, pursue the next Highway Safety Improvement Project (HSIP, 100% grant) for the same type of crosswalk and ramp work at the N. Main St./Washington St. intersection. He said we recognized this was a delay in completing the original scope of work, but it did ultimately reach that goal and improved another intersection from safety and handicapped accessibility standpoint. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the revised project and authorize staff to submit grant document later in 2021. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman White.

Keith Barker informed Council of an Industrial Development Authority appointment. He explained that Ed Hanks had submitted his resignation to the Galax IDA due to a conflict of interest in another Galax project. Council was asked if they would like for the IDA seat to be advertised, or if they would rather approach individuals themselves. The consensus was to search from within Council first and discuss at the March meeting.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

Keith Barker gave an overview of the status of various projects and initiatives that were underway with the City or with regional boards that he was part of. He said with Covid-19, some of our projects or board actions may have been delayed. These included:

- Bottom Area Project, Eastview Phase
- Bottom Area – Phase 4
- VDOT Projects - Cranberry Road Project, Safe Routes to School, McArthur St. Traffic Signal, Main St. Sidewalk Improvements, E. Stuart Drive Sidewalk Project, Phase II,
- Stormwater Projects - Parkwood Drive & Calhoun S./ Main St. Project
- T.G. Vaughan Furniture Plant Study, VT Economic Development Department
- Other - MRPDC Assistance, Kipling Lane & Galax East Site, Animal Shelter. Responded to numerous emails, calls, complaints, etc. throughout the month. Participated in numerous project progress meetings.
- Covid-19

COUNCIL COMMENTS


- Councilwoman White informed Council that she had been continuing to work with churches regarding foster care support.
- Councilwoman Ritchie informed Council that work had begun on the City's Comprehensive Plan with Planning & Zoning. She said a big part of the plan would be future land use.
- Vice Mayor Mitchell reminded everyone to get their Covid vaccinations when it was your turn, wear your masks, and wash your hands. He explained that it was critical to do so. Also, he reminded everyone to get your information from reputable websites like the CDC because he said there was lots of misinformation out there.
- Councilman Haynes spoke on the T.G. Vaughan Project. He said that a film crew had filmed the at the plant to pitch to future groups. He said they had done a great job on it.

Mayor Greene opened the floor for any visitors who would like to speak during the public comment portion of the meeting.

Mr. Stephen Thomas addressed Council regarding a proposed "Hippies Only Volkswagen Fest" tentatively set for Sept. 4, 2021 from 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. at Felt Park. The tickets would sell for \$10 – adults, and \$5 – children. He said that there will be vendors, bands, a VW show, various entertainment planned. Mr. Thomas said the music would be blue-grass oriented. He felt by choosing to have it on Labor Day weekend, there would be a better response. Council and Keith Barker spoke to Mr. Thomas regarding the need for him to keep in touch with Tony Quesenberry, Parks & Rec Director, and also to form a committee. They spoke on having volunteers to assist since this would be a large undertaking. Overall, the response was favorable from Council. Mr. Barker said that a vote would not be necessary since a public street would not be closed for this event. Council wished Mr. Thomas well and thanked him for coming.

With no further public comments, the motion was made by Councilman Haynes to adjourn the meeting. Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman White.

ADJOURNED at 7:57 p.m.



Mayor



Clerk